



## Procurement Practices and its Problems in Telecom Sector: The Case of Northeast Region – Ethiopia.

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### Abstract

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Procurement is a means by which an organization acquires goods, works & services based on law. In Ethiopia, the monopoly of telecom services rendered by Ethio telecommunication as a Government owned enterprises. More than two third of Ethio telecom northeast region's annual budget is spent to procurement. The negligence of the procurement unit has a direct impact on the performance of all departments in terms of additional costs. This paper is to identify the Perception of employees and Problems (Performance) of Procurement practices in the Ethio telecom. The research takes a form of explanatory research and primary data were used to collect data through questionnaires from a sample of 133 employees of the organization, interviews from procurement department head, focus group discussion from purchasing committee and the secondary data were collected from the organization's procurement department documents. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The major finding indicates that, the performance of the procurement department is low in terms of procurement of the right quality, time & source due to long work flow process flow of the new revised Works Procurement Policies and Procedures (WPPP), bureaucratic nature, lack of delegation, problem of planning in supplier's selection. Hence, the management of ethio telecom should give adequate emphasis on effective implementation of the Procurement manual, follow procurement principles, attention to user's complaints, prearranged mechanism to manage purchase documents and strong relationships with competent suppliers are desirable to uplift the telecommunications into a profitable service.

#### Key Words

Procurement practices,  
Telecommunication  
Works Procurement Policies and  
Practices  
5 Rights in Purchase

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### 1. Introduction

Public procurement is a key tool to promote objectives of an economic, environmental and social nature gaining much attention globally over the past decades. In developing countries, it is one of the main instruments to the achievement of development goals such as reducing poverty and providing health,

infrastructure, education and other services hence immensely contribute to best utilization of public resources [1].

All governmental entities of rich and poor countries were struggling in the face of unrelenting budget constraints; government downsizing; public demand for increased transparency in public procurement; and greater concerns about effectiveness, efficiency, fairness and equity. In addition, policymakers have increasingly used public procurement as a tool to achieve socio-economic development goals [2].

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According to a report of Ethiopian Procurement and Property Administration Agency, public procurement was started in 1940 EC. As per the World Bank Country Procurement Assessment Report Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia(2010), the rules and regulations have been enacted, successive review of the public procurement regimes in Ethiopia reveal a lot of shortcomings such as procurement laws and regulations are not based on recognized international models, absence of clearly defined central oversight and public bodies at all level, shortage of experienced management and procurement staffs, lack of transparency in the procurement processes, absence of procedures for modern form of procurement activities and unclear institutional and organizational arrangement required in the management of the public procurement process.

Telecommunications service was introduced in Ethiopia by Emperor Menelik II in 1894 when the construction of the telephone line from Harar to the capital city, Addis Ababa, was commenced. Further, the telecommunications sector was restructured and two separate independent entities namely the Ethiopian telecommunications authority and the Ethiopian Telecommunications Corporation were established by proclamation No.49/1996 on November 1996. As a continuation of the last five-year plan and after concentrating its efforts on education, health and agriculture, the Ethiopian government has decided to focus on the improvement of telecommunication services, considering it as a key lever in the development of Ethiopia, ethio telecom was born, on Monday 29th November 2010, from this ambition of supporting the fast growth of our country.

To ensure that ethio telecom runs parallel with top telecom operators, the Ethiopian government has reached an agreement with France telecom, one of the World's leader telecommunications companies. This agreement has helped ethio telecom to improve its management capability through the transfer of World renowned knowhow and skills. Despite these efforts, much research has not been done on efficiency of procurement in ethio telecom in general, northeast region in particular.

According to the Ethiopian Procurement and Property Administration Agency (PPA) report, out of the total public spending, more than 60 per cent goes to Procuring public goods and services. Procurement plays a key role for performance improvement & the attainment of organizational objectives by providing right quality of inputs for users at the right time and cost. However, the preliminary interview of employees indicated that, the procurement department of ethio telecom Northeast region was not playing this role satisfactorily.

In the case of ethio telecom, northeast region, much attention was not given to the timeliness & quality of goods and services bought and distributed to the users.

The preliminary investigation reveals that; procurement without plan, limited competition, delay of purchase & wrong specifications of the requisition of goods and services were common failures of the procurement department. The procurement process takes too long resulting in additional cost due to inflation, suppliers stock out items, user department work hindered, items become obsolete and accessories were not available anymore. Precisely, the five R's of procurement principles, the right quantity, the right quality, the right price, the right place and the right time were not properly implemented.

In principle there are six mode of procurement, among these open tendering (bidding) is a highly advisable mode of procurement than those of the others. But in practice the organization mostly uses pro-forma procurement (request for quotation) mode of procurement. This mode of procurement can negatively influence the organizational efficiency concerning procurement and is encored overhead costs and it is considered as a poor procurement practice, and high amount of procurement was done which costs around 3 million birr per year. That is demonstrating the repeated purchases in small amount but in yearly bases high amount of purchase is done and also there was no procurement planning, (2004-2009 EC procurement reports), these were the bottle necks to do the best procurement practices.

On the other hand, ethio telecom's procurement guideline; the revised Works Procurement Policies and Procedures (WPPP), Policy and Procedure which have been elaborated under Pre-Award (covered in Vol.-I) and Post-Award (covered in Vol.-II) was not implemented properly in ethio telecom Northeast Region. As a result of lack of proper implementation of the WPPP, the existing procurement practice was not effective in making available the needed goods, equipment's, materials, works and services in the right quality and quantity, at the right time and at the right price and in giving fair and equal chance to bidders. In addition, transparency in the procurement process and timely actions were not kept in mind that all actions towards award of contract and its implementation on the ground has to be fair, consistent, and transparent and based on the highest standard of ethics.

Therefore, by considering the above hindering problems of the organization, this paper tried to identify the perception of employees and also to evaluate the performance of procurement practice of ethio telecom in north eastern region of Ethiopia.

## 2.Literature Review

Some of the studies are reviewed irrespective of sector and nature of industries based on relevance to procurement problems of different organizations in Ethiopia. The local purchasing problems in the case of Almeda textile, showed that suppliers were selected using multiple criteria, which includes price, quality, supplier reliability & delivery promises and also the company is using both centralized and decentralized purchasing process and its suggested that the company should not use least price criteria to address poor quality purchase problems and use of purchasing plan [3].

The case study in Addis Mojo Edible Oil Factory to analyze the effects of procurement on organizational performance and the procurement process, he discussed continuous price fluctuations in the supply market, shortage of raw materials, poor quality of items, delayed procurement and unreliable suppliers are the key problems which adversely influenced the factory's procurement performance. Based on the analysis and findings discussed above, recommended to employ skilled manpower, and establishing permanent source of supply were solutions to alleviate the challenges [4].

A case study in foreign procurement practice of Ethiopian Electric Power Corporation presented two major problems impeding the international procurement as delayed procurement and communication gap between procurement and other units of the organization [5]. The researchers proposed that, the international procurement manual and the procedure should be revised to meet the current requirements of the activity and providing the necessary training for the purchasing staffs and assigning skilled manpower as the main solutions that should be implemented.

Based on the study on Public Procurement Reforms in Ethiopia: Policy and Institutional Challenges and Prospects in Ethiopia revealed that, the most common unethical practices with regard to public procurement were: bid rigging; abusing direct procurement and request for quotation; overestimation or under estimation of goods and services to favor a particular provider; excessive or unnecessary high prices due to limited or nonexistent competition and conflict of interest were among few of others [6].

Through the study on the related literatures, the basic principles of procurement of the five rights are not given much attention in practice, prevalent gap between theoretical discussions in procurement and the practical aspect, common problems in field of procurement such as lack of skilled manpower, minimal management attention for the function, Woldia offices.

unreliability of suppliers and absence of permanent and strong relationship with suppliers, out dated and ineffective purchasing procedures and manuals, wide use of least price suppliers selection criteria compromising quality, wrong quality purchases were frequently practiced & delayed purchases were common to all the organizations. The above reviews are related to other sectors and as per the knowledge of the researcher sources, there is no study relating to telecommunication sector in Ethiopia.

## 3.Material and Methods

The research takes the form of explanatory type of research design with quantitative and qualitative (mixed) approaches, with the main goal to assess whether the existing procurement practices of ethio telecom; northeast region is performed according to the principles of procurement of Five R's.

In this study, the assessment on local public procurement practices of ethio telecom northeast region, the target population, from where the samples are withdrawn, is employees of ethio telecom, northeast region operation & maintenance, fixed access network, direct channel,. Indirect channel and employees of two big offices which were, Kombolcha and Woldia offices. The rationale for the selection of these divisions and offices for this study is; because these departments& offices consume most of the materials and supplies purchased by the procurement department and have high amount of human resources. In this sampling frame, currently, there are a total population of 219 employees in ethio telecom; northeast region & two offices, ( ethio telecom HRD,2018).

Out of the 219 total populations, excluding 4 Managers (The Procurement committee) those purposively selected to the interview, the remaining 215 employees considered to be the total target population. To determine the sample size, the researcher applied the formula [7] assuming, the level of precision or sampling error (e) to be 5 per cent and desires a confidence level of 95 per cent while expecting a margin of error to be 5 per cent. From this, it is possible to calculate the sample size from the total population size of 215, to calculate the sample size, the researcher decided to apply the following formulae:

$$N = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where, N= total population, e= sampling error (standard error) and n= the sample Size

Therefore, the sample size was 140 and it was taken from the employees of the region, Kombolcha & Woldia offices.

Table 1. Sample Size Distribution Proportional to Size

Participants	Population (N)	Sample(n)	
	Employees	Total sample size (n x ni/N)	Percentage from n (ni x 100/N)
North eastern Region Operation & Maintenance	65	42	30
North eastern Region Fixed Access Network	52	34	24.29
North eastern Region Direct & Indirect Channel	40	26	18.57
Woldia Office	33	22	15.71
Kombolcha Office	25	16	11.43
Total	215	140	100

Source: Personal communication with HRD (2019)

As indicated on the above table, the samples were selected using stratified random sampling technique and for interview purpose of the managers were taken purposively which includes the Business partner manager, Finance manager, Human Resource manager & Operation & Maintenance Manager. Therefore, the sample size was 140 employees from the target population of 215 employees. To gather the relevant data from respondents, the researcher adopts stratified random sampling method.

Further, respondents from each stratum were selected through Lottery method. The primary data was collected through structured questionnaires which constitutes of closed ended and Likert scale questions in order to get relevant and effective responses from respondents.

Both structured and unstructured interviews were conducted with the procurement department head who is directly responsible to oversee procurement activities to enable a focus on specific issues. Furthermore, the physical observation is used to gather information from procurement documents, minutes, purchase requisitions, goods received notes and other relevant documents found in the purchasing department, in the main store and the region office. Focus groups discussion was undertaken with the purchasing committee (the Business partner manager, Finance manager, direct Chanel manager, indirect Chanel manager and human resource manager). Because, the managers were assumed to more involve in the procurement decisions those are considered key informants who were assumed to have special knowledge on the issue.

The documents consist of procurement department quarterly and annual reports, minutes of the procurement committee, procurement procedures of the ethio telecom including the new works & procurement policies and procedures, purchase

requisitions, goods received notes and other published sources are used as secondary data. To analyze the data, the researcher used descriptive statistical analysis methods, such as mean, percentage, standard deviation and frequency using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 23).

The researcher defines the criteria to measure the level of variables using five point Likert's scale. In the discussion of the results, the variable value was defined using width of class interval (Wathon et al, 2003) as follows:

$$\text{Interval width of each level} = \frac{\text{the highest score} - \text{the lowest score}}{\text{Interval number}}$$

$$= 5 - 1 = \frac{4}{5} = 0.8$$

Therefore, the result of the data analysis regarding each variable was defined using the following classifications:

Always = 5, Mostly = 4, Sometimes = 3, Rarely = 2, Never = 1.

Table. 2: Width of class interval in 5 scales.

Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
4.20-5.00	3.40-4.20	2.60-3.40	1.80-2.60	1.00-1.80

(Source: calculated as per Wathon et al, 2003)

#### 4. Results and Discussion

To assess the procurement practices implemented in ethio telecom: north east region questionnaires were distributed to a sample size of 140 selected employees using stratified random sampling proportional to size method. Of all the questionnaires distributed to the respondents 133 questionnaires were returned which represents 95 per cent of the total sample size.



Table 3: Background of Sample Employees

Profile	Category	Frequency	Percent
Sex	Female	40	30.1
	Male	93	69.9
	Total	133	100
Age	20-29	30	22.6
	30-39	58	43.6
	40-49	36	27.1
	50 or above	9	6.8
	Total	133	100
Education Level	Certificate or less	9	6.8
	Diploma	22	16.5
	First degree	94	70.7
	Masters or more	8	6.0
	Total	133	100
Experience	0-5	15	11.3
	6-10	24	18.0
	11-15	41	30.8
	16-20	36	27.1
	21 & above	17	12.8
	Total	133	100
Occupational Status	Worker	100	75.2
	Supervisor	14	10.5
	Jr. management	16	12
	Middle management	3	2.3
	Total	133	100

Source: Survey Results (2019)

#### 4.1 Socio demographic characteristics of Sample respondents

From the table 3, the level of education of most of the respondents (above 87%) of Ethio telecom north east region are diploma & first degree graduates and all the leaders in managerial positions are 2nd degree holders. Further, more than 77 per cent of the respondents have worked in ethio telecom: north east region at least for 6 years and the employees from various hierarchical levels across the ethio telecom north east region's structure from top to the bottom of the organization (worker, supervisor, junior managers and middle managers).

#### 4.2 Perception of employees on Procurement practices in Ethio Telecom

Likert scale questionnaires consists of 30 questions were distributed to the employees (procurement unit workers) of ethio telecom, north east region to collect the necessary data concerning the appropriateness of the existing procurement process, manuals & procedures, the procurement departments effort towards having good procurement practices and the management entity's effort to support the unit to improve its performance. Respondents were asked to

rank the measures as listed in the questionnaire, on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represented Never, 2 Rarely, 3 Sometimes, 4 Mostly and 5 always.

As presented on table 4, management of ethio telecom, northeast region sometimes arranges some training for the procurement staffs and mostly provides them with the necessary facilities and budgets to perform their tasks. But the managements support is limited in evaluating the procurement department performance according to the 5R's of procurement principles and in designing strategies for efficient procurement. Generally, the mean result computed above revealed that, the management is rarely supporting the procurement unit in ethio telecom north east region. As the information provided on the table 5 indicated that, the procurement department of ethio telecom northeast region failed to gather annual or semiannual needs of different departments and district offices of north east region, as a result of this, purchasing without plan causes to delay supply of items and interrupts operation of the organization and causes to incur unnecessary inflation costs.

Table 4: Managements effort to ensure effective procurement

S/N	Statements	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Std. dev	Relative degree	Class width
1	You are getting the necessary and timely training on procurement.	3	0.00	sometimes	2.60-3.40
2	The management of the region supports the procurement department with the necessary resources to undertake effective and efficient purchasing.	4	0.00	Mostly	3.40-4.20
3	There is a mechanism to encourage prompt procurement in the organization.	1.57	0.535	Never	1.00-1.80
4	The management periodically evaluates your performance based on the FIVE R's.	1.71	0.488	Never	1.00-1.80
Mean of means and standard deviations		2.57	0.51	Rarely	1.80-2.60

Source: Survey Results (2019)

Table 5: Procurement department's effort to ensure efficient purchasing

S/N	Statements	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Std. deviation	Relative degree	Class width
1	The procurement department gathers purchase needs from departments and service centers of north east region at the beginning of the year to plan for purchases.	1	0.00	Never	1.00-1.80
2	The procurement department provide sufficient stock for items which are frequently requested to reduce delays and work interruptions	1.57	0.535	Never	1.00-1.80
3	There is procurement that is undertaken without the awareness of the procurement department (e.g. petty cash purchases).	5	0.00	Always	4.20-5.00
4	The department implements a strategic purchasing for those purchases which are more critically important for the operation of the organization and consumes more budgets.	1.57	0.535	Never	1.00-1.80
5	There are ways to evaluate whether procurement are done according to five rights of procurement [right quality, right quantity, right price, right time and right source].	3.00	0.00	Sometimes	2.60-3.50
6	The procurement department registers and track warranty and latent defects liability periods.	1.57	0.535	Never	1.80-2.60
Mean of means and standard deviation		2.28	0.535	Rarely	1.80-2.60

Source: Survey Results (2019)

Table 6: Responses of Procurement Staffs on effective purchasing

S/N	Statements	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Std. dev	Relative degree	Class width
1	You do have a copy of a written Procurement policies and procedures. And you are also aware of the procedures.	5	0.00	Always	4.20-5.00
2	You think the policies, procedures and manuals of ethio telecom are timely, appropriate and suitable to the activities of procurement department.	2	0.00	Rarely	1.80-2.60
3	You confirm that requisitions contain the description of the material, quantity, and requisition date, the date the material is required and authorized signature.	4.57	0.535	Always	4.20-5.00
4	You undertake an investigation of the market to identify potential source of supply.	2	0.000	Rarely	1.80-2.60
5	You undertake a follow-up on suppliers to speed up the delivery to stay on the schedule	4	0.000	Mostly	3.40-4.20
6	You evaluate whether the materials purchased from the supplier have satisfied the need of the users departments.	2	0.000	Rarely	1.80-2.60
7	You are performing tasks based on the Works and Procurement Policy and Procedure document (WPPP) manual of ethio telecom?	3	0.577	Sometimes	2.60-3.40
Mean of means and standard deviations		3.22	0.56	Sometimes	2.60-3.40

Source: Survey Results (2019)

Table 7: Purchasers' opinion about the Procurement Process

S/N	Statements	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Std. dev	Relative degree	Class width
1	You think the selected procurement processes are appropriate to the requested items or services.	3.57	0.535	Mostly	3.40-4.20
2	You think that you follow the appropriate methods to identify the right supplier.	3.00	0.000	Sometimes	2.60-3.40
3	You give priority to "RIGHT QUALITY" as the most important objective to be met in your purchases.	1.57	0.535	Never	1.00-1.80
4	You give priority to "RIGHT QUANTITY" as the most important objective to be met in your purchases.	5.00	0.000	Always	4.20-5.00
5	You give priority to "RIGHT PRICE" as the most important objective to be met in your purchase.	5.00	0.000	Always	4.20-5.00
6	You give priority to "RIGHT TIME" as the most important objective to be met in your purchases.	1.57	0.535	Never	1.00-1.80
7	You give priority to "RIGHT SOURCE" as the most important objective to be met in your purchases?	2.00	0.00	Rarely	1.80-2.60
Mean of means and standard deviations		3.1	0.535	Sometimes	2.60-3.40

Source: Survey Results (2019)

Table 8: Purchasers' opinion about the users' Complaints

S/N	Statements	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Std. dev	Relative degree	Class width
1	The users complain about late purchases.	4	0.00	Mostly	3.40-4.20
2	The users complain about the low quality items purchases.	3.57	0.535	Mostly	3.40-4.20
3	The users complain about the lesser quantity purchases.	1	0.00	Never	1.00-1.80
4	The users complain about purchases from weak suppliers.	1	0.00	Never	1.00-1.80
5	The complaints rose from your inefficiency.	2	0.00	Rarely	1.80-2.60
6	The complaints rose from the procurement process.	4	0.577	Mostly	3.40-4.20
Mean of means and standard deviations		2.6	0.56	Sometimes	2.60-3.40

Source: Survey Results (2019)

Responses from the procurement staffs imply there are also purchases done other than the awareness of the unit (petty cash purchases) that are undertaken without plan. Generally, the mean of the responses revealed that, the likelihood of procurement unit's effort to ensure effective procurement is rare.

#### 4.2.2 Procurement Staffs' Responses on their own Responsibilities and Performance

As presented on table 6, even if the purchasers have a written policy and procedures (WPPP) that provides guidance and the various steps to be followed in the process of award of contracts for procurement of goods, works & services as well as during its implementation on the ground, they have not been performing tasks based on the procedures and they criticized it as inappropriate to practice in the existing conditions. In addition, the purchasers were not assessing the market to identify dependable sources of supply. The computed mean indicates, the procurement staffs' effort to ensure effective procurement lies in the middle range of the scale which is sometimes.

#### 4.2.3. Purchasers' opinion on the Procurement process of the Organization

The computed data shown in the table 7 reveals that, purchasers focus on the quantity and price of items in their procurement process rather than the quality and timeliness of the supply.

The computed data shown in the table 7 reveals that, purchasers focus on the quantity and price of items in their procurement process rather than the quality and timeliness of the supply. This indicates, user departments are receiving unfit or low quality inputs for their operations and they are not getting at the right time the planned work demands the items. This could

result in delay and low quality of organizations services delivery for customers.

#### 4.2.4 Procurement Unit Staffs opinion on the Users' Compliant

As shown on table 8, the department workers' response confirmed that users' mostly complained about the purchasing unit performances on the timeliness and the quality of the supply. On the other hand, users never complained about the quantity supplied and the suppliers of the item. Based on the above information, the complaints were raised as a result of the lengthy and least price criterion method of the procurement process.

#### 4.3 Procurement practices based on Focus Group Discussion and Observations

Focus group discussion conducted with the purchasing committee and personal observations of the procurement staff's activities, procedures, minutes and goods received notes were undertaken. Thorough investigation of various documents, the researcher understands that the procurement function of ethio telecom, north east region is organized as a unit reporting to finance head.

Thorough analysis of the procurement process, observations and focus group discussions, the researcher has identified a number of problems such as absence of procurement plan; Petty cash purchases; Pro-forma mode of purchases; Inadequate specifications in purchases requisition by procurement & bidding committee; Poor document handling and unprocessed requisitions, minutes and goods received notes; part time committee members give priority for their primary responsibility and often they miss meetings, postponement of meeting, and delay of procurement process; Least price selection criteria instead of adopting WPPP policy; Lack of skill and experience to procure technical items, establishing



a strategic planning for procurement and evaluating the procurement department according to the 5Rs of procurement criteria.

## 5. Conclusion

The performance of ethio telecom was not given to the quality and timeliness of items delivery, procurement department did not provide sufficient stock for items which were requested to reduce delays, work interruptions and unnecessary rush order expenses, strategic planning was not developed for frequently requested and most critical items which consumed more budgets items like electric materials; vehicles spare parts; stationeries and office supplies, more than 75 per cent of the employees were not promptly treated by the unit , procurement department did not give attention to the users complains concerning the quality and timeliness of the materials purchased. As a result of these creating wastage of organizational scarce resources and leads to poor performance of the organization.

To alleviate the problems of inefficient procurement practices, the ethio telecom should follow policies like strong support and participation by the management is needed for effective implementation of the WPPP Procurement manual, Periodic evaluation of purchases, provide sufficient stocks for items which are frequently requested, to reduce delays, work interruptions and unnecessary rush order expenses, strong relationships with genuine and competent suppliers is crucial, paying attention to the users complains by the procurement department, concerning the quality and timeliness of the materials purchased is essential to ensure good governance and improve performance of this service sector. the quality and timeliness of the materials purchased is essential to ensure good governance and improve performance of this service sector.

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